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RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0066  
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ 0064  
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 5938  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
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SUBJECT: SPOT REPORT: DAILY TRUST DIRECTOR ARRESTED FOR  
ALLEGED TERRORIST TIES

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (U) Local media are reporting on January 17-18 that Mallam Muhammed Bello Ilyas Damagun was arraigned before a Federal High Court in Abuja on January 16 on charges of terrorism. He is a director of the company which publishes the Daily Trust Newspaper. He is alleged to run a terrorist organization known as "The Nigerian Taliban" and is accused of accepting \$300,000 from a terrorist organization known as Alqaeda World Network, Sudan. The federal government is claiming that he intended to use the money to carry out acts of terrorism.

12. (S) COMMENT. Post is investigating, but at present has only limited information. Post has received credible information indicating that he is involved in the financing of extremist Islamic causes, and the Nigerian Taliban has announced that they would like to overthrow the GON. We believe he is tied to the Nigerian Taliban. While the charges are extremely serious, similar charges were proffered against him 3 years ago when he provided scholarships for several young men to a religious school in Mali. PolCouns interviewed Mallam and two of the students at that time and believes that the government made the correct decision in withdrawing those charges for lack of evidence. We will continue to investigate.

13. (S) COMMENT. Adding doubt to these charges is the fact that Mallam is a well known Northern political operator who is vocally opposed to the President. He also has a leadership position at an influential newspaper. When he was arrested three years ago, it was part of a sweep that the GON was making of opposition political leaders under the rubric of anti-terrorism operations. The evidence against him appears to be stronger now, although that does not eliminate the possibility that the arrest is still politically motivated. It is possible that he is guilty of the charges and that the government selected him as a target because of the present tense political environment. END COMMENT.  
CAMPBELL